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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002952

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/AA
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA/ERITREA: UNMEE AND EPRDF OFFICIAL COMMENT
SEPARATELY ON GSE AND GOE INTENTIONS

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 2864

[1B](#). ADDIS ABABA 2863

[1C](#). ASMARA 746

Classified By: ERIC WONG, POLITICAL OFFICER. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY. In a September 21 meeting with poloffs, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) Addis Ababa Head of Office Joseph Stephanides said that Eritrea's "fear" of being designated by the USG as a state sponsor of terror had prompted President Isaias to meet recently with senior UN officials. Eritrea reportedly sought to "wait out" Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles, and was thus pursuing a "long-term" strategy with regard to its disputed border. According to Stephanides, senior Ethiopian military officials believed that Eritrea could "not be changed from within," therefore prompting Ethiopia to refrain from providing material support to Eritrean dissidents, even in the face of Eritrean support for insurgents in Ethiopia. In the event that Eritrea sought to expel UNMEE from Eritrea and the Temporary Security Zone, Ethiopia would likely accept retaining UNMEE on Ethiopia's side of the border, believing it to serve as a useful tripwire. Such a "tripwire" function could be preserved even while downsizing UNMEE further, so long as military observers were kept intact, Stephanides concluded. In a separate meeting with poloffs, a senior EPRDF official explained that Ethiopia continued to believe that peace was essential for economic development, and that therefore Ethiopia would "not to go war by our own initiative," despite the September 24 declaration that Eritrea was now in "material breach" of the Algiers Accords.
END SUMMARY.

ERITREA REPORTEDLY FOLLOWING "LONG-TERM" STRATEGY

[12](#). (C) Stephanides asserted that Eritrean President Isaias's "fear" of being designated by the USG as a state sponsor of terror had prompted Isaias to meet recently with senior UN officials, including two prominent Americans: visiting UN DPKO Assistant Secretary-General for Mission Support Jane Holl Lute and Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs [1B](#). Lynn Pascoe. Observing that Iran had recently established an embassy in Asmara, Stephanides cautioned that USG designation of Eritrea as "a pariah" risked greater "radicalization" of the GSE, and would encourage broader

Eritrean engagement with Iran. (NOTE: Stephanides formerly headed the UN SYG's office in Iran, following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1987. Iran has an existing embassy in Addis Ababa. END NOTE.)

13. (C) Stephanides reported that on the margins of the September 5-6 Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) meeting, Amcit Lea Brilmayer, Legal Advisor to President Isaias, explained that Eritrea was pursuing a "long-term" strategy, by which it awaited the downfall of Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. Moreover, Isaias reportedly believed he would have better relations with the United States once a new U.S. administration came to power, Stephanides said.

ETHIOPIA: ERITREA CANNOT BE CHANGED "FROM WITHIN"

14. (C) While the regimes in Ethiopia and Eritrea each considered the other to be on the verge of collapse, Ethiopia was not actively assisting Eritrean rebels, Stephanides said. While GOE officials had asserted that the GSE was undermining Ethiopian sovereignty by arming or supporting Ethiopian insurgent groups, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) or the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), UNMEE lacked information that Ethiopia was shipping arms or other material support to Eritrean dissidents in Eritrea. Stephanides said that ENDF Major General Yohannes Gebremeskel (who represented Ethiopia at UN-chaired Military Coordination Commission meetings with Eritrea held until May 2006) had assessed that Eritrea could "not be changed from within." For this reason, according to Stephanides, Yohannes had informed him that the GOE was not/not providing material support to Eritrean opposition groups.

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ETHIOPIA VALUES UNMEE AS "TRIPWIRE"

15. (C) Discussing future scenarios for UNMEE in anticipation of the EEBC's 2006 decision to declare the disputed border demarcated "by coordinates" by the end of November 2007, Stephanides said that Ethiopia would likely welcome UNMEE continuing operations from along the Ethiopian side of the border, in the event that Eritrea sought to expel UNMEE entirely from Eritrea and the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). According to Stephanides, Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) Chief of General Staff (CHOD) General Samora Yonus had recently informed UN ASG Lute that Ethiopia would accept UNMEE operating primarily along the Ethiopian side of the border, if Eritrea expelled UNMEE from Eritrea. Ethiopia valued UNMEE's presence as a tripwire, Stephanides said, despite UNMEE's limited monitoring capabilities arising from GSE-imposed restrictions on freedom of movement.

16. (C) Stephanides recommended that the USG and others dissuade the EEBC from implementing its decision to declare the border "demarcated" in November 2007; the UNSC should also highlight the "unhelpful" role Eritrea was playing in Somalia, he said, consistent with reports from the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia.

AS TRIPWIRE, UNMEE COULD BE DOWNSIZED FURTHER

17. (C) Stephanides acknowledged that UNMEE could be downsized even further--removing infantry battalions but keeping the relatively small number of military observers (MILOBs) intact--and still fulfill a "tripwire" function. However, India and Jordan, as major troop contributing countries to UNMEE, would likely oppose such downsizing, he said, as they benefited economically from maintaining large contingents and associated equipment in the region.

18. (C) Questioned about possible successors to Acting UNMEE SRSg Azouz Ennifar, Stephanides said UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon sought to increase the number of women serving as UN envoys, and had therefore initially tapped a Jordanian woman as SRSg, but she was unavailable. A Swiss woman was the latest contender, but, as a European, she would have to confront the GSE's ban on European, U.S., and Canadian UNMEE staff serving in Eritrea.

EPRDF RULING PARTY DOWNPLAYS THREAT OF WAR

19. (C) In a separate September 26 meeting with poloffs and visiting Special Envoy for Somalia Amb. John Yates to discuss Somalia (septel), Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Foreign Relations Officer Sekature Getachew explained that the GOE's September 24 letter to the UN Security Council asserting that Eritrea was in "material breach" of the Algiers Accords was a "purely political statement" that was not/not intended to provoke war or highlight a causis belli. Ethiopia believed that peace was essential for its economic development; "we will not go to war by our own initiative," Sekature stated. Ethiopia's declaration to the UNSC was not/not a statement that "the ceasefire is over," but was rather intended to highlight Eritrean "transgression," Sekature added. Eritrean support for the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) and for Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys highlighted the GSE's role in seeking to destabilize the Horn of Africa, Sekature said.

110. (C) COMMENT. While Stephanides' assertion that UNMEE could be downsized even further preceded Ethiopia's September 24 announcement that Eritrea had violated the Algiers Accords, senior UNMEE officials have long asserted that its most crucial role is monitoring the main north-south axes in Sector Central of the TSZ, where the relatively flat terrain permits the movement of tanks and heavy armor between the two countries. MILOBs could continue to play this "tripwire" function, were UNMEE force levels cut further so that UNMEE

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transformed to purely an observer mission. While public statements by GOE civilian leaders (e.g., by FM Seyoum) since 2006 have been more strident, going so far as to assert that UNMEE could be abandoned, General Samora's private support for UNMEE to remain as a tripwire is consistent with previous statements he has made to USG officials advocating UNMEE's continued operation. Prof. Brilmayer's statement that the GSE seeks to "wait out" Meles, coupled with the EPRDF's explanation that Ethiopia does not seek war, suggest that the status quo political stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea will likely continue, despite concerns about recent troop movements near the border (septel). Post continues to advocate immediate action by the USG and other Witnesses to avoid conflict and re-engage both parties politically (ref B.) END COMMENT.
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